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Women's Picnics

Chap. XVI

Then crowds of women and children go outside the city walls to the neighbouring wells and green oases one or two miles away, and take their lunch and tea with them. Men do not accompany their women on these picnics, but each party of women has some slave women and a little boy or two to keep an eye on sisters and mothers and to call for help if necessary. These picnics are one of the most pleasing sights of Kuwait, for it means that women literally have left their prison houses, and are enjoying the lovely countryside and pure air outside the town. The picnics are very simple and well-behaved affairs, and those taking part appear to be happy in the extreme. If these picnics take place well away from any beaten tracks, a certain amount of quiet and decorous dancing also goes on. The women form circles, and whilst one of them starts to let down her hair and dance or sway about in sitting posture, her friends will sing pretty songs and keep time for her. Occasionally a woman slave, who has brought out a small drum, contributes a monotonous drum-beating. Should a man or horseman appear in the offing, singing and dancing is stopped and all become as quiet as mice, till he has passed by.

Occasionally, but not often, a few women of the unfortunate type are allowed to go out in a party for a picnic at *'Id*, but they keep well away from their more respectable sisters, and are never allowed to have men in their company. The official idea is that the festival is an equally happy one for them, and they also are entitled to be carefree and joyful.*

'ID AMONG THE TRIBES

The *'Id* in the desert, as in the town, is an occasion of rejoicing, feasting and paying calls. The people, being poorer and more simple, celebrate the festival with less display and expense. Horse races and camel races are held, however, and if men happen to have spare ammunition, they will have shooting matches.

The unmarried tribal girls go in perhaps for more dancing than their town sisters, and before noon and of an evening groups of them will get inside a tent, let down their hair and, after closing the tent

* In 1938 prostitutes were forbidden to leave the city, and even these picnic outings were prohibited.